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ABSTRACT

Based on the belief that learning can take place in the home as well as in the school, this booklet was developed as a means of helping parents contribute to the improvement of their children's oral communication skills. Various sections of the booklet contain the following: (1) a discussion of children's communication behaviors, including an explanation of each of the five types of communication--informing, feeling, controlling, imagining, and ritualizing: (2) a list of general guidelines for use by parents in developing those communication skills: and (3) specific guidelines for promoting each of the five communication skills, arranged according to the age of the child from preschool through grade 12. (FL)

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Parents as Teachers:
Helping Your Children to Become Better Communicators

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Donald F. Muirheid, Chairman
Illinois State Board of Education

Donald G. Gill
State Superintendent of Education

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FOREWORD

During the spring of 1980, representatives of the Illinois Speech and Theatre Association met with staff members of the Illinois State Board of Education to discuss and respond to the need for materials in oral communications. Following this initial meeting, the Illinois State Board of Education and the Illinois Speech and Theatre Association formed a special task force to develop materials and to research the needs created by the National Basic Skills Improvement Program which designated oral communications as being one of the four basic skills areas. Members of the special task force on basic oral communication skills included:

Philip A. Gray, Northern Illinois University (Chairperson)
Pamela Cooper, Northwestern University
Scott Lebin, Elk Grove High School
Mina Halliday, Illinois State Board of Education, Program Planning and Development
Maxine Joyce, Macomb High School
John Sharpham, Illinois State University
Joann Tuttle, Maroa Grade School
Bud Williams, Wheaton North High School

The task force developed a document identifying sequential oral communication skills, K-12: "Basic Oral Communication Skills: A Program Sequence for Illinois Schools" along with other related materials. As a companion document, this publication, "Parents as Teachers: Helping Your Children to Become Better Communicators," was also developed specifically for use by parents. The contributors to this document are:

Pamela Cooper, Northwestern University (Chairperson)
Kathleen Galvin, Northwestern University
Donna Ogle, National College of Education
Paulette Kappos, Crow Island School, Winnetka
Joann Tuttle, Maroa Grade School

I would like to especially thank these educators who both conceived of the idea and need for this document and who are offering their services to see that it is implemented successfully in Illinois.

Donald G. Gill

Donald G. Gill
State Superintendent of Education

INTRODUCTION

In 1979, Public Law 95-561 established a new Title II of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965. Included in this new basic skills legislation was "effective communication, both oral and written." Thus, oral communication became the fourth basic skill.

The State of Illinois recognizes the importance of basic skills instruction and the necessity for a State Basic Skills program in order to fully implement the State Board goal that "Every school system should assure that its students are prepared to leave school with the ability to read, write, and speak logically and effectively."

The State of Illinois has developed a comprehensive, statewide Basic Skills Program coordinating all federal and state funds. The program does not focus on new programmatic emphasis or activities in the schools, but has, instead, as its purpose to assist local schools to do a better job with the existing educational resources.

The Basic Oral Communication Skills Task Force, established by the Illinois State Board of Education and the Illinois Speech and Theatre Association, is developing and coordinating resources toward the improvement of instruction in basic oral communication skills. A document, "Basic Oral Communication Skills: A Program Sequence for Illinois Schools" has been created for use by school personnel. It outlines the general structure for sequencing instruction in oral communication, preschool through grade 12.

Because the learning of oral communication skills can take place in the home environment as well as the school, the task force was commissioned to develop this companion document to "Basic Oral Communication Skills: A Program Sequence for Illinois Schools." This booklet is designed especially for parents. The purpose of this document is to develop a means by which parents can contribute to improving the oral communication skills of their children.

COMMUNICATION BEHAVIORS

When we talk about communication, we are referring to the ability of children to put verbal and nonverbal language to work for them. Children's communication behavior affects how they interact with others, both in sending and receiving messages and eventually determines much of their future interpersonal relationships. These relationships will have a tremendous effect on your child's self-concept. A child who is praised, listened to and encouraged to communicate will develop a positive self-concept. Additionally language development affects your children's development of other academic skills. The ways young children use language and respond to language shapes their use of written language, both as readers and writers.

Some people imagine that because their children can talk there is no need to learn more about communication. Yet most successful persons have a very wide range of communication behaviors. They can use many different verbal

or nonverbal strategies in order to meet every circumstance. Such a range of communication behaviors only occurs through experience and practice in a variety of circumstances.

Communication researchers have identified five types of communication in which individuals should be proficient as both speakers and listeners: informing, feeling, controlling, imagining and ritualizing.* A brief explanation of each form of communication follows:

Informing: These are communication behaviors in which the person's function is to give information or to gain information: for example, providing information, demonstrating, explaining, questioning and answering.

Feeling: These are communication behaviors in which persons express feelings and respond to other's expression of feelings: for example, honestly stating how one feels, commiserating, reading another's non-verbal clues about feelings.

Controlling: These are communication behaviors in which persons attempt to influence another's behavior, or respond to someone trying to influence them; for example, persuading, bargaining, refusing, suggesting, arguing.

Imagining: These are communication behaviors in which persons function in imaginary situations: for example, acting, story-telling, speculating.

Ritualizing: These are communication behaviors in which persons engage in socially appropriate interactions: for example, greeting, leave-taking, participating in verbal games (pat-a-cake).

Communication researchers suggest that every person needs to develop a wide range of forms of communication. Then, depending on the circumstance, a child can select a specific strategy. Thus, a child may be able to show anger by yelling, by stating how angry he/she feels, by walking away to calm down, by engaging in a constructive conflict.

After making a choice, a child should be able to do it, not just think "What I should do is . . ." For example, it does no good to know you should state that you are very angry if you can't find the words or gestures to convey that message.

Finally, a child should be able to judge the effectiveness of an action. If I yell at my friend and he doesn't talk to me anymore, was I successful? Should I have tried to talk about my feelings? Should I have tried to ask why he took my bike before I started to yell?

*Developing Communication Competence in Children (Eds.) R.R. Allen and Kenneth L. Brown. Skokie, IL: National Textbook Company, 1976. See also booklets: "Development of Functional Communication Competencies: Grades Pre-K-Grade 6 and Grades 7-12." (Ed.) Barbara Sundene Wood, ERIC Reports, Speech Communication Association, 1977.

Thus, a child needs to develop a wide variety of communication behaviors, needs to select an appropriate act based on specific circumstances, needs to be able to perform the act, and needs to evaluate the effects of his or her own actions.

Because communication is such a complex and fundamental behavior, it deserves continuous and focused emphasis in the home. Unlike other school subjects which children may not encounter until reaching school, communication is learned at home before any formal education occurs, and children continue to gain lessons in communcation from home during all the years they attend school. For example, from infancy your children have been bombarded by communication: Smiles, frowns, statements about feelings, directions, questions, and countless other messages about daily life in your home. Thus, parents, brothers, and sisters are the primary communication teachers. Since family is the first classroom, your communication behavior becomes critically important. Although you may not consciously attempt to teach your child to communicate, you serve as a model, a very important model for communication learning. Children are more likely to learn through modeling, especially the modeling of people who are important to them. Thus, parents who enjoy communicating and who are able to model a wide range of communication acts provide their children with positive models.

The following guidelines and specific activities should serve to help you broaden your child's communication behaviors.

THE PARENT ROLE

General Guides:

1. Try to take time to listen when your child wants to tell you something. If you cannot stop what you are doing at the time, remember to ask your child later about the subject.

2. Share things about yourself with your children. Let them see you as a full human being who has many different feelings. Tell them about what makes you feel certain ways, such as sad or happy. Be sure to tell them your positive feelings about them, how much you care about them. Also, if you are upset with them, tell them how you feel and why you feel that way.

3. Let children learn about description and explanation. Explain things you are doing as you are doing them, such as following a recipe or repairing a broken toy. Ask them to tell you how they do this, such as their rules for a game or how they made a particular drawing. Ask for their opinions and feelings on a variety of issues.

4. Encourage your children to learn to make decisions on their own. A child who has learned to respond to simple choices, such as "Which sweater do you wish to wear, the red or the blue one?", will eventually be willing to make decisions about more complex problems.

5. Be willing to listen to a child's persuasive message--encourage him or her to take stands and explain reasons for them.

6. Be willing to admit a mistake or change your mind on occasion.

7. Let your children take part in negotiations, such as agreeing to do certain work for a particular privilege.

8. On occasion, let a child take a leadership position, such as leading grace or leading games.

9. Encourage children to join organizations--4-H, Girl/Boy Scouts, school clubs--which give them a chance to interact with others in a variety of communication contexts and use a variety of communication behaviors.

10. Communication learning is not all serious business. Use verbal and nonverbal language for fun. Encourage your children to role play using different voices or movements, dressing up and acting out stories. Tell your children stories and read to them aloud, then listen while they tell you stories or read poetry or stories to you.

11. Most children need guidance learning everyday social rituals. Help your child learn how to deal with ordinary social situations appropriately--answering the phone, introducing two people, expressing gratitude, taking turns in a conversation.

12. Infants babble, preschoolers rhyme words, 1-3 graders use songs and poems, 4-6 graders use jump rope jingles, 7-9 graders use codes and speak in Pig Latin, and 10-12 graders use slang. Encourage your children to play with language in these ways.

The following list of age-appropriate exercises should serve as examples of specific techniques you can use to help your children develop their informing, feeling, controlling, imagining and ritualizing competencies. Some activities can be used for a variety of communication behaviors, not just for the competency for which it is listed. Hopefully these will stimulate you to think of many other ways to help your child develop a wide range of communication behaviors. Every interaction provides an opportunity for a child to learn about communication.

Specific Guidelines

Preschool

Informing:

1. Play guessing games with your child. Locate a picture in a magazine. Tell your child "I am thinking of something in this picture. It is . . ." Describe the object and have your child guess what it is. Ask your child to describe an object that you can guess.

2. Encourage your child to start a collection: shells, coins, trading cards, toy cars, dolls, etc. Have your child share his collection with members of the family.

3. Take a walk around the block. Have your child tell you what she/he observes in the neighborhood.

Feeling:

1. Provide plain paper plates and crayons. Tell your child to draw a face on each plate depicting different emotions: happy, sad, angry, etc. Ask your child to tell you what makes her/him happy, sad, etc. Express your own feelings at this time.

2. Cut out cartoons and comic strips. Ask your child to describe what each person in the picture is feeling. How does the character show his emotion? Have you ever felt that way? When?

Controlling:

1. At bedtime, when your child is reluctant to go to sleep, ask her/him to give you <u>five</u> good reasons why she/he should stay up ten more minutes.

Imagining:

1. Create a "My Wish Book" with your child. Have her/him dictate a story to you. Write down what she/he tells you by putting one wish on each page. Have your child illustrate her/his book. Place your child's picture on the cover and include your child's name in the title.

2. Provide puppets for your child to play with. Encourage her/him to give puppet shows for family, friends and neighbors.

Ritualizing:

1. Teach your child simple songs and nursery rhymes. Start the rhyme and let your child finish it.

2. Provide a play telephone for your child. Have her/him pretend she/he is calling up Daddy, Grandmother, a friend, etc.

Kindergarten -- Third Grade

Informing:

1. Provide a tape player for your child to operate. Encourage her/him to create a channel T-A-L-K news program with major news stories, weather, sports, etc. Have your child play his/her news program for the family.

2. At lunchtime, ask your child to give you directions for making a peanut butter and jelly sandwich. Follow her/his instructions exactly. If your child says "Put the peanut butter on the bread," place the jar of peanut butter on top of the unopened loaf of bread. Quickly your child will learn to be more specific in giving directions.

3. Provide your child with drawing paper, crayons and markers. Ask her/him to create an invention (example: Fantastic Flying Machine). Ask your child to describe his/her invention and how it works.

Feeling:

1. Select two different books by the same author. Read aloud and ask your child to compare them. Which book does she/he like better? Why? Ask how does the book make you feel? What is your favorite part of each book? Why?

2. Cut out interesting pictures from magazines, newspapers, etc. Tape a different picture on your refrigerator door each day. Ask your child to describe what is happening in the picture. How does the picture make her/him feel?

3. Encourage your child to create a "My Favorite Things" scrapbook by giving her/him old catalogues, magazines, stapled sheets of drawing paper, scissors, glue, and crayons. Have your child cut out pictures of her/his favorite toys, games, clothes, sports, foods, etc. Ask your child to explain why she/he selected those particular favorite things.

Controlling:

1. Encourage your child to find humorous items in the house that she/he would like to try to sell to other members of the family: an old gym shoe, used tube of toothpaste, etc.

Imagining:

1. Set aside time when you and your child can be alone to view her/his baby photo album or collection of family photographs. Ask your child to imagine when the picture was taken. What do you think each person in the photograph might be thinking, feeling, and saying?

2. Have your child make and decorate a puppet stage out of an old cardboard box. Provide materials for your child to create puppets from old socks, paper bags, etc. Encourage your child to perform weekly puppet shows with his/her classmates.

3. Plan a monthly family entertainment show. Have each member of the family perform: tell jokes, sing, dance, play an instrument, etc.

Ritualizing:

1. Provide a place in your home where your children can play "Let's Pretend." Collect old hats, ties, purses, shoes, etc. and place them in a Let's Pretend Box. Encourage your children to act out different characters introducing themselves in a variety of settings: in the park, at a P.T.A. meeting, outside a movie theatre, etc.

2. Select a variety of humorous poetry books for your child. Read different poems to your child. Encourage her/him to memorize her/his favorite ones, and tell them to other family members.

3. Have your child retell familiar fairy tales and stories. (Cinderella, Three Billy Goats Gruff, Goldilocks and the Three Bears, etc.)

4. Play the game, "I'm going on a picnic and I'm going to take a _____." Ask your child to copy what you say and add her/his own item. Keep taking turns until one of you forgets.

Grades 4 -- 6

Controlling:

1. When there is a disagreement about what TV program to view, use it as an opportunity for each family member to try to persuade the others to watch their choice. Be sure to allow each person time to be heard. Give even the least verbal member equal time.

2. Arrange that one night a week children plan the evening meal. Have them decide what should be served, explain why, and help prepare the meal.

3. Have your child design an advertisement for something she/he likes (ice skating, reading, playing games) and persuade other family members to like it also.

Informing:

1. Provide your child the opportunity to gain information. For example, when shopping with the child, have the child ask the salesperson for assistance.

2. Encourage a younger child to interview an older child in the family on a topic she/he desires to know about, for example, what will the teacher or school be like; how do members of a club act; what books did the child like at the same age, etc.

3. Use family planning for a vacation as a time to build children's skills in informing. Have each family member research a different geographical area, become an "expert" in that area, and explain about the area to the other family members. A decision about where to vacation or where to go on an outing can then be made based on time, finances, family interests, etc.

Feeling:

1. Have your child decorate her/his room with collages she/he makes to depict her/his feelings, moods, likes/dislikes, etc. Discuss with your child what the collages "mean" or signify.

2. Talk about feelings with your child. For example, when your child tells you about an incident at school, ask "How did that make you feel?" Share your own feelings about a particular situation.

Imagining:

1. Play "what if...then" game. Have each family member think of a situation and other family members discuss what would happen if the situation really happened.

2. Have your child retell her/his favorite TV show, movie, or book. Ask her/him which character she/he identified with and why.

3. As a family, read a story to its climax. Discuss or act out how the story might end. Compare your family's ending to the real ending.

Ritualizing:

1. Encourage your children to tell jokes, ghost stories, poems, etc. Share the enjoyment of their humor at home.

2. Have your child invite a friend over for dinner. Talk about how to make introductions before the guest arrives: Then have your child introduce her/him to other family members by saying one thing about each family member.

3. If your family says grace, let your child lead it.

4. When meeting new people, introduce yourself and allow children to introduce themselves.

Grades 7 -- 9

Controlling:

1. Have your child convince an older brother or sister to take her/him to a movie, allow her/him to borrow one of their most "treasured" possessions.

2. Have your child utilize logical arguments--for example have him/her discuss "why I should get a larger allowance."

Informing:

1. Have your child teach you something she/he does well, i.e., a dance step. Listen carefully and ask questions to help her/him elaborate.

2. As a family, investigate your family heritage. Make a family photo tree. Have each child choose a family member and tell about her/him. Interviewing grandparents can be a fun source of information.

3. Play the game "Person, Place or Thing." Each family member takes a turn, thinking of a person, place, or thing. Other family members ask questions that can be answered with yes or no responses. Set a limit of 20-25 questions. Whoever guesses the person, place, or thing takes the next turn. (Particularly good to play while traveling.)

Feeling:

1. Play "Feeling" charades. Family members divide into two teams. Each team writes situations on small pieces of paper and puts them in a hat, jar, or some type of container. Each team member takes a turn drawing a slip of paper from the other team's container, pantomime the situation as well as how they'd feel if they were in the situation. Other team members guess the situation and the feeling. Each pantomime is limited to two minutes. The team with the least time wins.

2. Describe to your child various feelings you've had during the day. Have her/him describe some of her/his feelings.

Imagining:

1. Play Charades. The process is the same as "feeling" charades except that team members pantomime titles of songs, movies, TV programs or books.

2. Orally make up a story such as a fairy tale, tall tale, etc. One family member begins the story and each family member adds to it until the story is complete.

Ritualizing:

1. During dinner, discuss dinner rituals. Discuss such questions as: Do you say grace? How long does dinner usually last? What topics are not discussed? How important is it to be on time to dinner? How do you know when you can leave the table?

2. Discuss appropriate behavior at parties--slumber parties, school parties, boy-girl parties. When your adolescent gives a party, have her/him introduce guests to the family. Discuss ways to end the party.

3. Encourage active listening habits. If children aren't attentive to each other, insist for one meal or conversation that no one can talk until they've repeated what the other speaker communicated.

4. When children discuss school and their interactions there, ask them what kind of language they use in classes with their teachers. Discuss how important the use of more standard English is in formal settings. You might mention that you, too, shift your level of formality depending on the situation you are in. When is slang appropriate? Do your children notice how adults respond to different levels of interaction?

Grades 10 -- 12

Controlling:

1. As a family, list some current problems in your family. Define the causes from each family member and discuss possible solutions. Try to listen to each other without arguing or interrupting.

2. After a newscast or reading a newspaper, discuss with your adolescent the issues and encourage her/him to be persuasive about her/his view.

Informing:

1. When a need arises, take time to ask your adolescent to explain to you something she/he is an "expert" on--the latest fashions or car maintenance.

2. Discuss with your adolescent the topics of importance to her/him such as plans for the future (college, job, etc.), draft, favorite teacher, favorite subject, politics, community issues, etc.

Feeling:

1. When a conflict arises between you and your adolescent or between any members of the family, ask the persons involved in the conflict to try and "put themselves in the other person's shoes." Discuss how the other person might be feeling and why.

2. After seeing a movie, TV program, or reading a book, discuss with your adolescent which character she/he identified with, why that character felt the way she/he did and why.

Imagining:

1. After a newscast or reading the newspaper, discuss with your adolescent what it would be like to be the person in the news story, what might the person's motives be, what would your adolescent do in a similar situation.

2. Have a guest from another culture to your home for dinner. Read about the country. Think of questions to ask your guest. Listen attentively. After the guest leaves, discuss what it would be like to be a member of that culture.

Ritualizing:

1. Discuss dating rituals with your adolescent--who pays, who calls who, time adolescent should be home, whether date should come to the door, etc.

2. As your adolescent is applying for jobs, discuss interviewing rituals--appropriate dress, questions normally asked by employers, questions your adolescent might want to ask, etc.

3. Practice translating some slang, informal behaviors into more formal adult interactions. You can use such common interactions as greetings for adults compared to close friends or ways to thank strangers compared to ways to thank close friends for favors rendered.

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